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SUBJECT: WHITHER SENEGALESE ISLAM?: AESTHETICS, HARMONY
AND DOWN-DIRTY POLITICS

REF: A. DAKAR 0833

- [1](#)B. 06 DAKAR 2940
- [1](#)C. 06 DAKAR 1721
- [1](#)D. 05 DAKAR 3108
- [1](#)E. 05 DAKAR 2999
- [1](#)F. 05 DAKAR 0643
- [1](#)G. 04 DAKAR 2915
- [1](#)H. 04 DAKAR 2201
- [1](#)I. 04 DAKAR 1468
- [1](#)J. 04 DAKAR 0797

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Sufi Brotherhood intellectuals inspired by Middle Eastern ideas are building institutions to reconsider traditional values, but they insist Senegalese common sense will sort out doctrinal trash. This is an opportune time for ideological innovation: the once narrowly nationalist and farm-bound Mourides are stressing education and research on their founder's beliefs, and Tidjanes are resurging with region-wide proselytizing. Within each Brotherhood, would-be successors are positioning to replace octogenarian Khalifs; there could be challenges to accepted methods of succession. The state might even intervene. END SUMMARY.

BEAUTY, BEHEADINGS AND BOMBS

[1](#)2. (C) We have reported on middle eastern Islamic ideas crossing the Sahara and Sahel (Refs G-H and J). One of our political officers, having read a few pages on Afghanistan, picked up the notion that a defense of Islamic aesthetics could be a sensitive religious issue, and asked several key religious scholars about it. Recent International Visitor (IV) and former University Imam Mamadou Niang guessed the term must refer to ethics and morality, and specifically to women's place in Islam, whether it was proper, appropriate and beautiful in God's eyes that women should play a public or strictly private role. The Mouride Hizbut Tarquiah's Atou Diagne just snorted, "Ah, mais ces Afghans...sont tous des dingues (They're all nuts)!" Then, though, and with great hesitation since he had just fallen in love with America and especially Washington State during an IV visit, Atou suggested that Islamic aesthetics might refer as well to the morality of war and the ethics of proportionality. "The U.S. was right to go after al Qaida, but Osama Bin Laden was the enemy, and the massive bombing of Taliban, of Afghans in their own country, especially of civilians in their homes, is hard to justify morally." We could not press him to go further.

13. (C) We posed the question to former Islamic Institute Director Elhadj Rawane MBaye, who said he had dealt with Afghans in the past and always found them at "the far borders of Islam and... frankly, a bit extreme." MBaye added that Islamic aesthetics, "assuming there is such a thing," was not an issue for tolerant Senegalese. We recall him telling us two years ago (Ref F) that Senegal's Sufis had successfully synthesized Islam with rites of an animist past. Mourides carried marabouts' pictures about their neck with no thought of restrictions on depicting the human form, and another small brotherhood kept libations and incantation urns, but not even Salafist reformers objected. Adding a Western artistic or musical overlay was just another act of synthesis, and Senegalese were open to anything pleasing as long as it was not in direct disharmony with the Koran or disrespectful of the Prophet.

THE PICKAXE AND THE NEATLY PRESSED GOWN

14. (C) The hard-work-as-faith Mourides and more numerous Tidjanes are in direct competition to influence and perhaps eventually dominate Senegal's politics and economy. Tidjane spokesman Abdoul Aziz Sy al Ibn (Junior) told us recently he was appalled by President Wade's use of Mouride militia leader Bethio Thioune to counter the Tidjanes' own presidential candidate in the key city of Thies (Ref B). "Just because Wade is a Mouride," Junior fumed, "the Mourides think they can walk all over us. But I've warned the Mourides, if you think you can do what you want with us, I'll mobilize my Tidjanes and we'll occupy your giant mosque in Touba before the end of the day!"

15. (C) Tidjanes see Mourides as dung-booted, unwashed and illiterate millet farmers who worship the work ethic but

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don't understand the subtleties of Islam. Mourides, in turn, see Tidjanes as effete tea-sippers who favor exhausted doctrinal truisms to hard labor of either the physical or mental kind. Or at least, so it seems to us. We asked Imam Niang, who has a reputation as a very moderate Salafist reformer, about the future of Senegalese Islam. That future, he insisted, would be in Mouride hands. As the decades have gone by, Mourides have sent their young acolytes abroad, first for street-corner sales, then for technical and high-tech training, and now, as their wealth allowed them the luxury, they were sending intellectuals for Arab higher education in Islamic jurisprudence or philosophy, and bringing them back. They will man the university being built in Touba, and provide research assistants to what Niang calls the increasingly influential Khalifal Library. What Niang did not mention was Atou Diagne's Hizbut Tarquiah Center for Research on Mouridism, a well-funded and state-of-the-art center modeled on what Diagne saw at U.S. universities.

16. (C) And yet while Niang is right about Mourides' growing intellectual thrust, he may be wrong in assuming Tidjane passivity. It may be only our impression, but the Libyan Islamic Call-sponsored university in Pir (Ref I), the Saudi-backed Franco-Islamic school in Louga, and perhaps above all the Sahel and Nigeria-directed missionary work of the Kaolack Tidjanes and the Association of Moroccan and Senegalese Imams and Oulemas (Ref C), all point to a renaissance of Tidjane activism in the face of Mouride intellectual, spiritual and political challenges.

BELLES LETTRES AND COURTLY PALACE COUPS

17. (C) It is a safe bet that the Tidjane and Mouride Khalifates currently run by 80-year olds will soon be under new proprietorship. The Mourides are highly centralized and supposedly monolithic, and Tidjane authority is widely dispersed; so the succession contests may play out quite differently.

18. (C) Tidjane spokesman Junior suggests his Khalif has

authority to leave a letter posthumously naming his successor, and since Junior runs the khalifal household including presumably its epistolary coordination, this would give him a competitive advantage. Other Tidjane marabouts, though, argue that consensus is needed, and could vote for Junior, his older brother Cheikh Tidjane Sy, or, just within the realm of possibility, for a third candidate. The result could be significant for Tidjane ties to the state and degree of closeness to the U.S. Junior, despite the truculence reflected in paragraph 4, has proved a force for social peace and the youth movement run by son Moustapha Sy ("the Good," in Embassy shorthand), is pro-U.S. In contrast, Cheikh Tidjane has allowed the radical Moustarchidines run by son Moustapha Sy ("the Bad") to commit violence in the name of Islam, and would almost surely be outspoken in criticism of the U.S.

¶9. (C) The Mouride founder and his sons possessed divine spark and mystical purity. His last son will die soon, and the next Khalif will come from the 100s of grandsons whose ranks include lie-abouts, womanizers, money-grubbers and assorted other blackguards who show up before parishioners only annually to collect tithes. Since the line of successors includes 80-year olds as far as the eye can see, Mourides have to do one of three things: accept decline in the quality of khalifal leadership; accept that future khalifs will be figureheads, which would lead to Tidjane-like organizational fragmentation; or, a radical alternative, choose a Khalif from outside the founder's bloodline (Ref E). This is where the Hizbut Tarquiah's Atou Diagne and President Wade's Mouride militia ally Bethio Thioune come in, since each, more or less explicitly, has staked a claim to take over the Brotherhood. Any of these things could happen, or the Mourides could simply begin to break apart like the Tidjanes before them.

¶10. (C) In the last Mouride leadership contest in 1945, the French colonial power, joined by independence leader and future founding President Leopold Senghor, intervened to block a Khalifal contender they saw as nationalist and favorable to pan-Arabism. If khalifal selection breaks down again and threatens internal Brotherhood crisis, President Wade or a successor could likewise be tempted to intercede, with whatever ramifications for state-mosque relations that might have.

COMMENT

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¶11. (C) We posed a question that turned out to have no significance for Senegal's Muslims -- on Islamic aesthetics -- and received an unexpected critique from a good friend on U.S. use of military force in Afghanistan. We have written often that there is a formula to Senegalese religious opinion of U.S. policy: firm opposition to our policy on Palestine and Israeli interventions in Lebanon; conviction that occupation of Iraq was a strategic and moral error; but, except for a Mouride/Salafist imam at the radical airport mosque, sympathy for 9/11 and full agreement with our counterstrike against al Qaida. Now, though, we have heard criticism on Afghanistan from the heart of a brotherhood that emphasizes placing its economic emigrants in the U.S and which, furthermore, cultivates discretion and reticence on sensitive topics. We wonder, therefore, how deep and widespread Senegalese religious disfavor with our Middle East policy and South Asia policies might be.

¶12. (C) The next few years will see considerable leadership flux within both major brotherhoods and openings for new ideas. Each is expanding educational or research institutions or proselytizing associations, and more actively comparing traditional Sufi ideas with more rigorous ideas from the Arab east. Mouride Atou Diagne once called this "Salafism of method," which, as we interpret it, means replacement of Sufi mysticism with a more analytical and

intellectual approach. At the same time, the two brotherhoods are competing for dominance, and there may be a temptation to recruit and hold converts with a more-attractive-to-youth militancy. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's SIPRNet site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.
JACOBS